

READJUSTMENT OF SIZE AND WEIGHT LIMITATIONS
ON PARCEL POST AND OTHER FOURTH-CLASS MAIL

AUGUST 21 (legislative day, AUGUST 1), 1951.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. SMATHERS, from the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 1335]

The Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, to whom was referred the bill (S. 1335) to readjust size and weight limitations on fourth-class (parcel post) mail, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with amendments, and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

AMENDMENTS

The bill is amended on line 6, page 1, by striking out "twenty" and inserting in lieu thereof "thirty". The purpose of this amendment is to make the weight limitation, in zones 3 to 8, inclusive, 30 instead of 20 pounds.

The bill is further amended by adding after the words "star route," on line 1, page 2, the words:

or (3) containing baby fowl, live plants, trees, shrubs, or agricultural commodities (not including manufactured products thereof)

The purpose of this amendment is to remove the restriction as to size or weight if the parcel contains any of the commodities listed in the amendment, and permit such commodities to be subject only to weight and size limitations under present law.

GENERAL STATEMENT

The reported bill, S. 1335, deals only with limitations of size and weight of fourth-class mail. Fourth-class mail is composed of several subclasses, the major part of which is parcel post. In the fiscal year 1950, according to the Post Office Department Cost Ascertainment Report, there were 1,179,415,486 pieces of mail carried in fourth class, of which 1,008,631,565 were parcel post. Many of these parcels were of considerable size and weight and the rapid increase in what,

2 READJUST LIMITATIONS ON PARCEL POST AND FOURTH-CLASS MAIL

in many instances, might be termed freight, has given the Post Office Department considerable concern and has caused the Postmaster General, on more than one occasion, to say that the Department would like to get out of the freight business. However, the committee recognizes that parcel post was inaugurated as a service not only to those of the rural areas and smaller communities but to serve more adequately all desiring rapid handling of small parcels.

To further illustrate the housing difficulties of the Post Office Department, it should be borne in mind that there has been no authorization for the construction of Federal buildings for post-office purposes since 1938. The last Federal buildings under that authorization were completed and occupied in 1941. Postal revenues in 1941 were \$812,827,736 and in the fiscal year 1950 this had reached an all-time peak till that date of \$1,677,486,967. In addition to that increase in dollar volume, there has been a substantial increase in larger parcels due to the diversion to parcel post of much bulk material previously transported as express or freight. This diversion was the result of several factors, one of which, of course, was the increase in freight and express rates which made shipment by parcel post more economical.

During the fiscal year 1950 the weight of fourth-class mail was 7,370,096,371 pounds, of which 6,950,255,267 pounds were parcel post. The average weight per piece in fourth-class mail was 6.22 pounds with an average weight in parcel post of 6.89 pounds. However, even though only 0.537 percent of parcels in fourth class in 1949 exceeded 50 pounds in weight, this aggregate represented 5 million parcels or 300 million pounds.

The actual breakdown as to weight of parcels in fourth-class mail is shown as follows:

Fiscal year	1 to 20 pounds	21 to 25 pounds	26 to 40 pounds	41 to 50 pounds	51 to 70 pounds
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
1949	92.163	2.643	3.766	0.891	0.537
1950	91.669	2.720	4.067	.964	.580

The parcel post service was established in 1912. Unquestionably, the primary object at that time was to provide a transportation service for small parcels, with a special thought toward giving to the farmer an opportunity to sell his products direct to consumers in the larger centers. Also, it appears that the original object in setting up the Parcel Post System, was to enable persons living in rural districts, and small communities, to receive merchandise by mail direct from merchants and other shippers in the larger centers. It is interesting to note the text of the first paragraph of section 8, Public Law 336, Sixty-second Congress, that established a Parcel Post System, which reads as follows:

That hereafter fourth-class mail matter shall embrace all other matter, including farm and factory products, not now embraced by law in either the first, second, or third class not exceeding eleven pounds in weight, nor greater in size than seventy-two inches in length and girth combined, nor in form or kind likely to injure the person of any postal employee or damage the mail equipment or other mail matter and not of a character perishable within a period reasonably required for transportation and delivery.

It will be further noted that in the original law as to fourth-class mail there was a maximum weight of 11 pounds but no minimum. However, rather early in the history of parcel post, the minimum weight in fourth-class mail was fixed at 8 ounces with the present law carrying a minimum weight of 8 ounces and maximum of 70 pounds. These changes have been in compliance with authorization contained in Public Law 336, Sixty-second Congress (37 Stat., pt. 1, p. 558), to permit the Postmaster General to change the weight and size limitations.

It is impossible to make a categorically accurate statement that the postal service is entirely one of service or that it should be operated strictly as a business enterprise. It is an immense business but at the same time it serves more of our citizens, more frequently and more intimately, than any other branch of the Government. It is a service that cannot be dispensed with, even for a day, without considerable inconvenience and hardship. For this reason it is not possible at all times to make the fee for this "service-for-hire," as it has been termed, fully cover the cost of the particular service in question. However, when it is considered that, in its present status, parcel post has become an express and freight business, requiring large buildings for housing, and ever-growing transportation facilities by rail, highway, and otherwise, and that it is a business in direct competition with private enterprise, it is understandable that it has been the theory, from the beginning, that parcel post should pay its way. Speaking on this subject, in connection with the bill before the Sixty-second Congress that established parcel post, Senator Bourne, of Oregon, said:

Mr. President, it was the desire of the committee and of myself to establish a system [parcel post] that we were satisfied would be absolutely self-supporting.

In a separate bill, S. 1046, the committee is reporting legislation that will, in the opinion of the committee, make parcel post substantially self-supporting, although that is not true as to some other subdivisions of fourth-class mail.

Public Law 336 (57 Stat. 557, 62d Cong.) that established the Parcel Post System, was approved August 24, 1912, and went into effect January 1, 1913.

The following table gives weight and size limits since that date, to present:

Effective	Authority	Weight limit	Size limit
Jan. 1, 1913.....	Act of Congress, Aug. 24, 1912.	11 pounds.....	72 inches.
Aug. 15, 1913.....	PMG Order No. 7349.....	20 pounds, zones 1 and 2; 11 pounds, zones 3-8.	Do.
Jan. 1, 1914.....	PMG Order No. 7706.....	50 pounds, zones 1 and 2; 20 pounds, zones 3-8.	Do.
July 19, 1915.....	PMG Order No. 9005.....	50 pounds, zones 1 and 2; 20 pounds, zones 3-8.	84 inches.
Mar. 15, 1918.....	PMG Order No. 1140.....	70 pounds, zones 1-3; 50 pounds, zones 4-8.	Do.
Aug. 1, 1931.....	PMG Order No. 1416.....	70 pounds, zones 1 to 8.....	100 inches.

Seventy pounds and 100 inches, length and girth combined, is the present limit as to all fourth-class mail. However, both Houses, within recent years, have considered the desirability of readjusting these limitations in weight and size. In S. 1103, Eighty-first Congress,

4 READJUST LIMITATIONS ON PARCEL POST AND FOURTH-CLASS MAIL

this committee reported a bill that restricted fourth-class mail to 60 pounds and 72 inches, length and girth combined, all zones.

In the same Congress the House passed H. R. 2945 which was pending before this committee upon adjournment and which restricted weight and size in fourth-class mail exactly as set forth in S. 1335, as introduced—40 pounds in the first and second zones, 20 pounds, third to eighth zones, and 72 inches all zones.

It should be borne in mind that only in the act that created the parcel post service was the limitation as to size and weight the result of direct congressional action and that all subsequent changes were by action of the Postmaster General, with the consent of the Interstate Commerce Commission. However, these limitations, resulting from action of the Postmaster General, have been recognized by the Congress in its consideration of various bills designed to readjust postal rates.

H. R. 2945, on the House floor, was amended February 8, 1950, to remove the weight and size limits if the mailings were to or from post offices of the third or fourth class or to or from rural or star routes. The effect of this amendment, which is reflected in S. 1335 as introduced, would be to assure persons served by offices of the third or fourth class or living on rural or star routes, of the continued use of the 70-pound maximum weight limit and the maximum size limit of 100 inches, length and girth combined.

S. 1335 was amended in committee by increasing the weight limit in the third to eighth zones from 20 to 30 pounds and by adding a specific proviso exempting baby fowl, live plants, trees, shrubs, or agricultural commodities (not including manufactured products thereof) from the provisions of the bill, the effect of which will permit such products to move to and from under the existing weight and size limitations, regardless of the size of the post office.

It will be noted that the weight limitation is less rigid in the first and second zones than in zones 3 to 8. The purpose of this is to remove any hardship on those who must obtain equipment or other supplies not available in their local market areas.

Also it should be noted that the restrictions of 40 and 30 pounds, depending on zone involved, prohibits shipping as fourth-class mail certain commodities above these weight limitations, whereas, as the Postmaster General points out in his letter of July 13, 1951, such commodities can be shipped up to 44 pounds to many foreign countries.

As previously stated, this legislation recognizes that the parcel-post service is inherently a small-parcel service and that the postal service is not designed to handle large and heavy parcels. This was evidenced when this service was established by making the weight limit 11 pounds subject, however, to administrative modification as discussed in this report.

A second factor that is important is that this drawing from private enterprise, better equipped to handle heavy and large packages, of 300 million pounds of parcels in 1950, each of which weighed in excess of 50 pounds, presents a real economic problem to the express industry and their employees.

Testimony was introduced during the hearings on this bill as set forth in the following table:

Year ending June 30	Number of less than carload lot express shipments	Average number of express employees	Number of parcel-post pieces at zone rates
1946.....	220,463,444	80,945	821,226,867
1947.....	214,737,874	78,823	936,418,134
1948.....	167,289,420	70,845	992,517,251
1949.....	120,382,497	59,116	1,048,920,633
1950.....	97,240,405	48,403	1,008,631,565

According to the report of the Interstate Commerce Commission covering employment in the railway express industry for the month of May 1951, there were 41,789 employees in the railway express industry at that time.

Reduction in revenue.—There is no available data upon which the committee could make an estimate of reduction in revenue to the Post Office Department through diversion from the postal service to the railway express service of these larger parcels.

AGENCY REPORTS

There are attached reports from the Postmaster General, the Assistant Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and the Comptroller General directed to the bill as introduced; and a supplemental report from the Postmaster General directed to the bill as amended.

OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,
Washington 25, D. C., July 13, 1951.

Hon. OLIN D. JOHNSTON,
Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
United States Senate.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Reference is made to your request for a report on S. 1335, a bill to readjust size and weight limitations on fourth-class (parcel post) mail.

This measure provides:

"That on fourth-class matter the limit of size shall be seventy-two inches in girth and length combined and the limit of weight shall be over eight ounces and not exceeding forty pounds in the first and second zones and twenty pounds in the third to eighth zones; except that in the case of parcels (1) mailed at any post office or on any rural or star route for delivery at any third- or fourth-class post office or for delivery by any rural or star route carrier, or (2) mailed at any third- or fourth-class post office or on any rural or star route, the limit of size shall be one hundred inches in girth and length combined and the limit in weight shall be over eight ounces and not exceeding seventy pounds.

"Sec. 2. All existing laws or portions thereof, inconsistent or in conflict with this Act, are hereby amended or repealed.

"Sec. 3. This Act shall take effect on the first day of the third calendar month following the calendar month in which it is enacted."

This bill would reduce the size limit for fourth-class matter from 100 inches in length and girth combined to 72 inches and reduce the weight limit from 70 pounds to 40 pounds for the first and second zones and 20 pounds in the third to eighth zones except that there would be no reduction in the weight and size limits for parcels addressed for delivery at any third- or fourth-class post office or by rural or star route carrier or when mailed at any third- or fourth-class office or on a rural or star route.

It is estimated that during fiscal year 1949 less than 5 percent of the total parcels mailed at the zone rates originated in offices of the third- and fourth-class or on rural and star routes. This indicates that the vast majority of the 5,478,173 zone 1 and 2 parcels which exceeded 40 pounds in weight and the 49,529,990 zone 3 to 8 parcels which exceeded 20 pounds in weight would not be acceptable

6 READJUST LIMITATIONS ON PARCEL POST AND FOURTH-CLASS MAIL

under the provisions of this legislation, unless the physical contents of such parcels could be divided into one or more packages. Assuming that the contents were compatible with division, patrons probably would present a greater number of small parcels for mailing, retarding the acceptance and handling of parcel post and further taxing the inadequate postal facilities for handling such mail.

There are approximately 12,800 third-class post offices and approximately 19,900 offices of the fourth class. There are also over 32,000 rural routes and more than 11,000 star routes.

While the provisions of this measure would meet the needs of rural patrons and other persons in communities and towns dependent upon parcel-post facilities, serious difficulties would be encountered in administering this legislation. Window clerks at first- and second-class post offices would have to ascertain the class of office shown on each parcel before determining its mailability. References to two separate lists, an alphabetical and a State, would be necessary to determine the class of office and the proper zone, or it would be necessary to revise and merge these lists. Because of numerous changes, a new list would have to be supplied each year. In those instances where the name of addressee, city and State normally constitute a good address, it would be necessary to question the patron as to whether the parcel would be delivered from a box, general delivery, or a rural route emanating from the office address. Any increase in the time required to accept parcels would be a substantial increase in the expenditures for handling this class of mail.

Experience gained many years ago, when the limit of weight for parcel-post matter was not uniform for all zones, showed that numerous irregularities and difficulties arose, such as the forwarding of parcels from the office of original address to another office in a zone for which a different weight limit applied; or, in connection with the returning of a parcel to an office in a distant city other than the one from which originally mailed.

This legislation also would result in discrimination against patrons served by post offices of the first and second classes. For example, assume that a patron of a first- or second-class office presented two parcels exceeding the 20-pound limit for delivery to either of the zones 3 to 8 and one of the parcels is for delivery in the city delivery service and the other is addressed for delivery on a rural route. The parcel for delivery in the city delivery service would not be acceptable whereas the one for delivery on the rural route would be acceptable, notwithstanding the fact that both parcels would be intended for delivery through the same post office. A further discrimination would result from the fact that the proposed weights at 40 and 20 pounds are lower than the 44-pound limit which applies to parcels mailed to many foreign countries.

Legislation of this nature probably would result in persons and concerns, located in cities having post offices of the first or second class, mailing their parcels at nearby offices of the third or fourth class.

In view of the foregoing, this Department does not favor the enactment of this legislation.

Inasmuch as data are not available on the number of parcels destined for delivery at third- and fourth-class offices or rural and star routes, it is not possible to furnish an estimate of the cost or savings that might result from the enactment of this legislation.

Sincerely yours,

J. M. DONALDSON, *Postmaster General.*

OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,
Washington 25, D. C., August 15, 1951.

HON. OLIN D. JOHNSTON,
*Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
United States Senate.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This will acknowledge your letter of August 14 enclosing a revised copy of S. 1335 in the form in which it was ordered reported to the Senate by your committee on the same date, and pursuant to your request the following comments on the revised bill are submitted for consideration:

The purpose of S. 1335 as originally introduced on April 13 of this year provided for the reduction of the limits of size and weight for fourth-class or parcel-post matter from 100 inches in girth and length combined to 72 inches for all zones and from 70 pounds for all zones to 40 pounds in the first and second zones and 20 pounds in the third to eighth zones except for parcels (1) mailed at any post

office or on any rural or star route for delivery at any third- or fourth-class post office or for delivery by any rural or star-route carrier, or (2) mailed at any third- or fourth-class post office or on any rural or star route, in which case the present limits of size and weight would be continued.

As revised, the bill would make the limit of weight 30 pounds instead of 20 pounds in the third to eighth zones and would except from the reduced limits of size and weight parcels containing baby chicks, live plants, trees, shrubs, or agricultural commodities (not including manufactured products thereof).

In the Department's report dated July 13, 1951, on S. 1335 as originally introduced, the objections to the measure were pointed out in detail. In discussing the bill before your committee on May 17, I stated that because of the exceptions provided for in the bill it would be impracticable to administer its provisions and, furthermore, such provisions would be discriminatory in that they would deny to many patrons a service which would continue to be available to other patrons. While a provision of the bill providing for exceptions to the proposed reductions of size and weight for parcels might meet the needs of rural patrons and other persons in communities and towns dependent upon parcel post facilities, serious difficulties would be encountered in administering such exceptions. Window clerks at first- and second-class post offices would have to ascertain the class of office shown on each parcel before determining its mailability. References to two separate lists, an alphabetical and a State, would be necessary to determine the class of office and the proper zone. Because of numerous changes, new lists would have to be supplied each year. In many instances patrons would have to be questioned as to whether the parcel would be delivered by box, general delivery, or a rural route. Obviously, the additional time required to accept parcels would effect a substantial increase in the cost of handling parcel post mail.

Additional features which would make the provisions of the bill undesirable and impractical are the fact that many parcels exceeding the limits of size and weight proposed might be divided into a number of smaller parcels, resulting in the presentation of a greater number of parcels for mailing thereby retarding the acceptance and handling of parcel post and further taxing the inadequate postal facilities for handling such mail; the exceptions provided for in the bill would undoubtedly cause persons and concerns located in cities having post offices of the first or second classes to mail their parcels at nearby offices of the third or fourth class or on rural or star routes, thereby defeating the purpose of the measure.

The additional exceptions of baby chicks, plants, trees, etc., and agricultural commodities from the proposed reduced limits of size and weight would further complicate the administration of the provisions of the bill and present difficulties in determining the acceptability of parcels for mailing. The application of the term "agricultural commodities, not including manufactured products" would undoubtedly raise numerous questions and interfere with the smooth operation of the parcel-post service.

In view of the foregoing reasons as well as other objectionable features which might be cited, the enactment of S. 1335 is inadvisable and unwise and is not favored by the Department.

Sincerely yours,

J. M. DONALDSON, *Postmaster General.*

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,
BUREAU OF THE BUDGET,
Washington 25, D. C., August 1, 1951.

Hon. OLIN D. JOHNSTON,
*Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
United States Senate, Washington 25 D. C.*

My DEAR SENATOR JOHNSTON: This will acknowledge your letter of April 16, 1951 inviting the Bureau of the Budget to comment on S. 1335 to readjust size and weight limitations on fourth-class (parcel post) mail.

Because of the interest of the Post Office Department in this proposal, its views were requested, and there is enclosed herewith a copy of a report, opposed to the enactment of the legislation, which it is understood the Post Office Department has presented to your committee. It will be noted that the Post Office Department points out that experience gained many years ago, when the limit of weight for parcel-post matter was not uniform for all zones, gives evidence that irregularities and administrative difficulties will result from the enactment of the legislation.

8 READJUST LIMITATIONS ON PARCEL POST AND FOURTH-CLASS MAIL

The Bureau of the Budget concurs in the comments set out in the report of the Post Office Department and, accordingly, recommends that your committee not give favorable consideration to this bill.

Sincerely yours,

ELMER B. STAATS,
Assistant Director.

COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington 25, April 19, 1951.

Hon. OLIN D. JOHNSTON,
*Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
United States Senate.*

MY DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I have your letter dated April 16, 1951, enclosing a copy of S. 1335, Eighty-second Congress, entitled "A bill to readjust size and weight limitations on fourth-class (parcel post) mail," and requesting any comments I may care to offer concerning the proposed legislation.

This Office has no information as to the need or desirability of the proposed legislation and, therefore, I have no recommendation to make with respect to the merits thereof.

Sincerely yours,

LINDSAY C. WARREN,
Comptroller General of the United States.

